

WHAMO

World-Herald Attitude Monitoring Operation

A citizen's organization providing an alternative voice

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Court of Public Opinion Will Be a Harsh Judge

World-Herald Manages News to Its Own End

by Robert Mundy

Mundy is an Omaha businessman and attorney.

When the World-Herald reported the Feb. 23 indictment of Peter Citron, who has been charged with two counts of felony sexual assault of a child, it followed a previously established pattern of not being open with the public and its readership. On that occasion, the paper disclosed that Citron as well as Larry King were among the five prominent Omahans named on the now famous DeCamp memo as "central figures" in the child sexual abuse investigations related to Franklin. Why name two and not the other three? Neither Citron nor King has been indicted for abuse crimes related to Franklin.

Furthermore, the W-H has not disclosed a possible conflict of interest in that one of the remaining three is a leading figure at the World-Herald.

Such a breach of journalistic integrity would be bad enough, but there are those openly asking if Nebraska's largest newspaper is deliberately slanting its coverage of this story and attempting to undermine justice by attacking the credibility of witnesses.

This is not a new issue. On July 20, 1989, the World-Herald editorialized, "the credibility of some of the child abuse rumors has for some time been in doubt." But in an Aug. 2, 1989 Lincoln Journal story, Jerry Lowe, former chief investigator for the Legislature's Franklin Community Credit Committee, was reported as believing the article to be inaccurate, and in violation of the confidentiality of the investigation. Senator Dennis Baack of Kimball agreed and was quoted in the same story as questioning a major newspaper (the World-Herald) printing the information "in such a sarcastic, cynical kind of manner." Baack said he thought the World-Herald was trying to discredit the witnesses.

This month, the same charge was leveled against the World-Herald by Concerned Parents, a private citizens' group which has attempted for nearly a year to get the facts out. At an Omaha press conference held Feb. 21, 1990, spokesperson and Concerned Parents member Trish Lanphier stated, "In article after article, the World-Herald has brought up the subject of credibility. The World-Herald did this with the first three witnesses. The public has largely forgotten about them. We cannot allow the World-

Herald to discredit these new witnesses."

Indeed, Lanphier and others contend the World-Herald has in fact begun an unacknowledged campaign to impugn the three new witnesses recently discovered by the Franklin Committee. Examples of this include a headline referring to one witness as a convicted felon, feature stories on the witnesses' background and lifestyles, and critical editorial comment. This in spite of the Nebraska Bar Press Guidelines, which suggest statements or opinions concerning the credibility or anticipated testimony of prospective witnesses are generally inappropriate for disclosure.

"I almost suspect the press is doing it deliberately in an attempt to limit the investigation," said Bellwood Senator Loran Schmit, who heads the Legislature's Franklin Committee, in a Feb. 17, 1990 Lincoln Journal story. By contrast, as Concerned Parents pointed out in its Feb. 21 news conference, "we know that the World-Herald has reported nothing about the suspects." There are other examples of what appears to be an overall policy of news management:

--In the last year there has been a mere handful of published Public Pulse letters concerning the sexual-abuse issues of the Franklin case. It is almost impossible to believe there have not been scores of letters submitted to the World-Herald about such controversial subjects.

--The John DeCamp memo naming five Omahans as suspects was distributed to more than 10,000 Omaha households by businessman and former political candidate Denny Henson. Until now, none of the media, including this publication, have disclosed the identity of the suspects. However, the World-Herald even chose not to disclose that the memo was directed to Bob Dorr of the World-Herald.

--Stories on the Franklin case, except those attacking the witnesses' credibility and several others within the past few weeks, have been buried in the paper's back pages.

--Until Citron's indictment, no stories whatsoever have appeared based on interviews with the accused perpetrators (the World-Herald recently reported it had contacted four of the five and all had refused comment), their lawyers, friends, present or former colleagues or family.

--There have been no stories contrasting media standards and pre-grand jury

coverage in this case and others, such as the investigation of former Omaha mayor James J. Dworak and others in 1964.

--There has been noticeably superficial coverage, especially when one sifts through the Lincoln Journal press clippings, about former Police Chief Robert Wadman's handling of the original Franklin investigation and his reaction to the Schmit Committee's criticism of the investigation by the Omaha Police Department. In a Sept. 24, 1989 story, the Lincoln Journal quoted Senator Schmit as saying Omaha Police Chief Wadman was very upset when he (Wadman) told Schmidt that members of the legislature's Franklin Committee could be watched by law officers. Schmit was quoted as saying "he (Wadman) said 'we can get something on

anybody' or something of that nature."

--There are well-known (newsworthy) individuals in Omaha who feel the World-Herald is guilty of a double standard -- that is, accusations made against them were immediately printed on the basis of a single source and without corroboration.

Nearly eight months ago the Nebraska Observer called for the convening of a county Grand Jury. Finally, next month, through the efforts of Concerned Parents, the Schmit Committee and many others, that call will be answered when the Grand Jury meets. There will be no Grand Jury to consider the action and inaction of the Omaha World-Herald. But the World-Herald will be judged by the court of public opinion. I believe the judgment will be critical and long-lasting.

Even With Dad in Aurora, Ill.

Herald Nailed Boyle's Kids; Wadman's Are Let Off the Hook

by John Boyd

We continually wonder about the latex-like properties of the World-Herald's editorial policies, and marvel as they are pulled to fantastic shapes to match the needs of the editorial brass.

We were most recently set to wondering about the paper's policy on identifying minors involved in scrapes with the law.

There have long been rumors that the minor children of a certain ranking World-Herald editor and a certain former Omaha Police Chief were involved in fairly serious scrapes with the law.

The World-Herald progeny was allegedly involved in major vandalism at a school; the former police chief's son was involved with two others in the theft of \$200 and other property from a classmate at Millard North High School.

Not surprisingly, both cases were quickly hushed up, daddies rushed to the rescue, restitution was made, no charges were pressed, and not a word was ever mentioned in the news.

On the other hand, minor children of former Mayor Boyle were regularly pilloried in the World-Herald; the 16-year-old son of an Omaha Police officer was named on a drug possession charge; and other minors are regularly named in the World-Herald

for a variety of offenses.

In fact, Boyle recently mentioned this inequity as one of the root causes of his falling out with Chief Wadman.

While World-Herald executives obviously claim no preferential treatment was given in coverage of the Wadman youth, the appearance of a quid pro quo is hard to avoid: no police case against an editor's son and no press coverage of the police chief's son.

That's why our interest was piqued when an anonymous caller brought to our attention a small story buried in the Feb. 3 World-Herald.

It was a great tragicomic story with which editors at most other papers would have had a field day:

A Douglas County sheriff's patrol was taking a suspected drunken driver to the sheriff's office when, WHAM!, their cruiser was hit by *another* suspected drunk driver. The driver of the car hitting the cruiser was ticketed for DWI, and all three occupants of the car were ticketed for being minors in possession of alcohol. Great story, so far.

The "rest of the story" is that one of the passengers ticketed for minor in possession was 18-year-old Brent R. Wadman, son of former Omaha Police Chief Robert Wadman.

Not So Public Pulse

Is the Public Pulse really public? Stephen P. Horn of Blair doesn't think so. Five of his last six letters to the Omaha World-Herald's letter column were not published -- in Horn's words, "censored." Horn's letters to the Public Pulse were all short enough to be published in full, and some (see second letter, below) have been on controversial subjects such as the Franklin Credit Union collapse. How many letters has the World-Herald received on Franklin, Horn wonders, and how many of those were actually published? (We've wondered the same thing.) Most publications, the Observer included, edit letters for grammar, clarity and space considerations, and does not guarantee publication. Horn believes the World-Herald censors letters by removing key phrases, placing them under misleading headings and placing editorial comments below some letters in an attempt to disprove points of view the paper disagrees with. Below are two of his most recent "censored" Public Pulse letters, published in full.

Feb. 5, 1990
Public Pulse
Omaha World-Herald
15th and Dodge
Dear Sir:

Governor Orr wants us to question who would stand to gain and who would lose if the latest tax proposal is passed. Too bad someone did not ask the same question in the case of the large tax breaks given to

encourage business to locate or to stay in Nebraska. Isn't it nice to see that all of us have to pay higher electric rates now so that electric cables may be properly located in the Riverfront Development?

How many different cost overruns do various rate/taxpayers have to pay for the privilege of protected species?

Sincerely,
Stephen P. Horn

Horn followed up with this inquiry two weeks later. As of deadline, he has not received an answer from the World-Herald.

Feb. 21, 1990
Editors: Omaha World-Herald
Dear Sirs:

Just sending you these letters for your info. I do not expect them to be published. I am curious if you care to comment as to why this latest letter was not published.

I also am interested in your response to the Aug. 30, 1989 article by (State Senator Ernie) Chambers in The Nebraska Observer. It seems to me that he makes a most interesting case in his article. His statements as to the rather unusual (for him) decision on your part not to publish are also very interesting especially since this article was printed far before the latest round of letters and "unsubstantiated rumors." (See Chambers' article, elsewhere this section.)

I find it rather flattering that even a poor slob like me can have equality with Senator Chambers before your censor's cutting torch.

Censoredly yours,
Stephen P. Horn

WHAMO would like to hear from people whose letters to the "Public Pulse" have repeatedly gone unpublished. Our address is WHAMO, P.O. Box 31383, Omaha, 681313.

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Foresight From Last Summer

What Chambers Said About Abuse Coverage

A longer version of the following article was first published in the Nebraska Observer Aug. 30, 1989.

by State Sen. Ernie Chambers

The World-Herald refused to print the following "Another Point of View". Never, in the past, when one of their editorials mentioned me, have they refused to print my response. In this unusual instance, I talked with Editorial Page Editor Frank Partsch five times before he told me "they" decided not to print it.

Such conduct is reprehensible and raises questions about whether (publisher) Harold Andersen, indeed, may be trying to forge a cover-up

A lengthy Sunday World-Herald editorial (July 23rd) lavished praise on Sen. Loran Schmit for changing the direction of the special legislative committee looking into the collapse of Franklin Credit Union from child abuse allegations to "following the money trail." In adopting such a posture, the W-H merely exercised a legitimate prerogative. However, the method by which it attempted to justify its position was wrong. Going beyond trying to discredit young witnesses and abuse victims through ridicule, the editorialist wrote outright falsehood. I shall deal only with the most egregious example.

The editorialist wrote:

"The credibility of some of the child-abuse rumors has for some time been in doubt. One child, who has been under psychiatric care, is said to believe that she saw George Bush at one of King's parties. This is the same person whose story of a severed head was looked into. Neither tale could be verified."

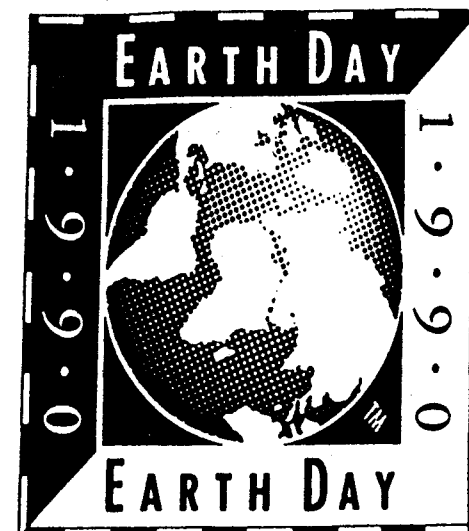
Having read all committee reports, I say categorically (as has former chief investigator Jerry Lowe) that no child "who has been

placed under psychiatric care" said anything at all about George Bush. The editorialist lifted bits and pieces from more than one report dealing with comments of more than one person, lumped them all together and contrived, thereby, the false impression that it all came from the "same person." If negligently done, the act is professionally inexcusable; if deliberately done, ethically reprehensible. (Incidentally, since the name of George Bush was mentioned, why did the editorialist not go ahead and include the names of prominent local persons, also?)

If the writer had access to committee reports, he could not possibly have concocted the offending paragraph accidentally. If somebody fed him the "information," his source lied. (The Lincoln Journal, in a front-page story dated July 25, reported, "Frank Partsch, editorial page editor of the World-Herald, declined comment on the accuracy of the editorial and on whether (Sen.) Schmit gave information to the newspaper.") In any case, rectification should have been forthcoming from the W-H.

The falsity of the paragraph was discussed extensively on KKAR Radio (and a veteran W-H reporter heard it); I again discussed the matter in detail with the editorial page editor July 25th, two days after the KKAR program; the Lincoln Journal covered the issue in depth on July 25th; on July 26th, W-H reporter Robert Dorr told me, "it is not the News Department's job to correct editorials."

Speculating that the W-H would print a correction and apology the following Sunday (July 30th) since the falsehood was printed on a Sunday, I refrained from writing until now. It appears there is no intent to rectify the matter.



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Invertebrate Press Corps Sins By Omission

by Molly Ivins

The real damage done during Bush's tenure as the spook spokesman was in policy. That was the era of the "B Team," the crowd of neoconservative defense experts headed by Richard Perle, who were called in by Bush and allowed to override the CIA's own top Sovietologists and military analysts. The immense defense buildup of the REagan years was based on the B Team's erroneous analysis of the Soviet threat. Their intention was to force the Soviets to "spend themselves into the grave." Both CIA and DIA analysts now agree that the Soviets didn't bite; they never tried to match our Reagan-era buildup because their economy was already collapsing--while we spent the country into social disintegration all by ourselves.

That's one more reason why the emergence of an invertebrate press corps is so troubling. There have been several unsparing diagnoses of the press lately, such as Noam Chomsky's analysis of our institutional ailments in *Manufacturing Consent*.

and Mark Hertsgaard's look at our collective cowardice in *On Bended Knee*. None of the deplorable trends noted by these critics in either print or broadcast journalism is new--they're just getting much worse.

The most disturbing development among the Washington press corps is a collective amnesia about the purpose of a newspaper--which is to gather news. The mortal sins of the press have always been our sins of omission, not our sins of commission, no matter what you may have heard about bias, hubris, or anything else. It is the stories we don't get, the ones we miss, pass over, fail to recognize, don't pick up on, that will send us to hell. The list of what we missed during the Reagan years includes everything that mattered--we missed Iran-Contra, HUD, S&Ls, and the entire game plan; until David Stockman told us what it was. And then we sat around criticizing Stockman for a tattle-tale.

When...

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it got beaten to a pulp on the Watergate story, you have some idea of what the problem is there. The Times sends out reporters to write down the words of powerful people, who frequently lie. The Times then prints the words and has its columnists double dome them. It serves as a megaphone for official lies and then lets some zippy thinker like Flora Lewis or Abe Rosenthal gum it over for us. No one is out getting the news.

Journalistic bum-kissing has reached new depths. Nancy Reagan, according to her book *My Turn*, never could have made it through those dark and terrible days after the Iran-Contra scandal broke--when her dopey husband had just been exposed as a liar, again--had it not been for the love, encouragement, and constant support she received from her "pals"--George Will, Katharine Graham, Mike Wallace, and Meg Greenfield, editor of the Washington Post editorial page. Isn't that nice? As I.F. Stone pointed out, the only way for a journalist to remain independent is, "To sit in your tub and not want anything. As soon as you want something, they've got you!" That includes wanting the approval of the powerful and even the approval of your peers. Perhaps especially of your peers.

At the national convention of the Society of Professional Journalists in October

1989, the featured speaker at the main banquet was Al Neuharth, a press baron of whom the best that can be said is that he is not as bad as Rupert Murdoch. When asked why Neuharth, the man who invented USA Today so newspapers could be just as bad as TV, had been asked to speak to professional journalists, an official of the organization explained that Neuharth's company has contributed a lot of money to the group. And these are the people who are supposed to explain why we need campaign finance reform.



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World Herald, National Enquirer Get Behind Their Man

CBS May Be the Perfect Place for Andy Rooney

by Anthony Carr

Constant readers doubtless have noted that the Omaha World-Herald has joined the National Enquirer in displaying its disapproval of Andy Rooney's suspension by CBS news president David Burke following Rooney's remarks about black and gay people ("Attack by the Thought Police Strikes Down Another Victim.")

Rooney, 70, has been making snide, even nasty remarks about gay people for years. Recently, after stating, on a Dec. 28 CBS special that "homosexual unions" cause premature death, he was stupid enough to equate AIDS with homosexuality to a reporter for the largest gay newsmagazine in the world.

In a post-interview letter, Rooney wrote: "I find the popular argument that it is the AIDS virus, not homosexuality, that kills, to be spurious..."

The swift response to all this by the World-Herald's alert, discriminating editorial staff has been to wonder why Rooney is sitting "on the sidelines accused of bigotry."

Even more interesting than the Herald's reasoning (fascinating though it be), was CBS' claim that it suspended Rooney in part because of his anti-gay sentiments.

In fact, the network has repeatedly exhibited a pronounced streak of homophobia.

On two separate occasions, in "documentaries" about homosexuality, CBS has falsified footage purporting to depict gay people. The most recent example was "CBS Reports: Gay Power, Gay Politics," a hatchet job aimed at San Francisco's gay community and aired about 1982.

George Crile, the project's Reporter/Producer, was insulting enough to then-mayor Diane Feinstein that for the first and only time in her political career, she threw a journalist (Crile) out of her office.

When the show aired, it was ripped by gay and straight newspapers throughout the Bay Area. Gay people in journalism raised several formal complaints about CBS to the National News Council. CBS eventually apologized (on the air) for dubbing a phony crowd reaction onto footage of Feinstein addressing gay constituents. Many felt CBS should have apologized for a lot more.

"Gay Power, Gay Politics" producer Crile later had a hand in the documentary which prompted General William Westmoreland's libel suit against CBS. That program was profiled in TV Guide under the headline "Anatomy of a Smear."

Mike Wallace, instrumental in getting CBS to suspend rather than fire Andy Rooney, himself hosted a CBS "documentary" about homosexuality aired in 1967.

Dr. C. A. Tripp, in his 1976 book, "The Homosexual Matrix," described the program:

"...Young, talented producers were as-

signed to the task, and at other levels, too, the whole project was well motivated.

"In an effort to give an inside view, five homosexual men were interviewed on camera with questions designed to show how their lives looked to them. The producers chose individuals with differing slants. Two were quite disturbed people who would provide drab reports, a third man would present a mixed picture, and two others would reflect a certain healthy cheerfulness. The blend was supposed to give the report balance, but this was not quite how it worked out. In preliminary editings, the two drab cases tended to come across merely as disturbed individuals, while for some reason the 'happy' examples seemed to greatly outweigh them. A new balance was struck by editing the mixed case in such a way as to make it decidedly 'unhappy.' (This man later threatened to sue the network for misrepresenting him but did not actually do so.)

"There were other 'unhappy notes' too. Included in the program materials were several short interviews with professionals, none of whom said anything very favorable, and the two psychiatrists among them (Irving Bieber and Charles Socarides) gave quite dire reports. With all this in mind, the producers wanted to leave the other two interviews with 'happy' subjects alone. They especially appreciated the handsome, all-American-boy freshness of one young man -- among themselves they called him Jack Armstrong -- and they liked the note of

relief he gave to what otherwise now threatened to be a too-dreary picture of the homosexual.

"But when the documentary was first completed and came up for executive preview, it was decided that this segment was still too supportive. It was not that anybody thought the ratio of 'happy' material was too high. It was just that this particular man happened to have such a strong, clean exuberance that his whole bearing seemed (in the eyes of some) to 'recommend' his style of life. This would be dangerous. It might bring charges that the documentary was 'for' homosexuality, or at least be disturbing to advertisers and possibly draw letters of complaint from the public. Yet to cut out the segment would bias the program in an already strongly stated negative direction. What the producers finally did to 'fix' the interview was remarkable. At crucial points they cut the sound track into separate words and phrases, and by rearranging these they managed to change the man's sentences and the gist of what he was saying.

"The program was broadcast only once, for when 'Jack Armstrong' saw what they had done to him -- and heard himself say uptight, completely unfamiliar things -- he entered a formal complaint against CBS, citing fraud, withdrawing his release, and thus freezing all re-runs."

One can only wonder why CBS suspended Rooney (in part) for being the homophobe that he is. He would appear to

fit beautifully into the niche that CBS has always reserved for homophobia.

As for the World-Herald, it is a newspaper which has never shown a serious inclination to opine against real-life examples of anti-gay bigotry or violence. It is a newspaper which (even before it had the excuse of AIDS concern) wanted private, same-sex adult sexual relationships to remain felonies punishable by prison terms. It is a newspaper which threw an editorial fit when the Unicameral decided otherwise.

Now it is a newspaper which defends Andy Rooney's "different" point of view against those "thought police" who can't "distinguish a genuine difference of opinion from an ad hominem attack" but says that it doesn't defend "racist, sexist or anti-gay putdowns."

Right.

Want to Tell CBS What You Think of it or Andy Rooney?

As of 2/26/90, CBS had received 5,061 calls supporting Rooney and 72 calls critical of him. The telephone number of CBS News is (212) 975-4321. The fax number is (212) 975-1519. CBS News President David W. Burke's address is CBS News, 51 West 52nd Street, New York, NY 10019.

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